United Nations E/CN.6/2005/NGO/16

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 January 2005

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-ninth session
28 February-11 March 2005
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Aland Islands Peace Institute, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.

05-22548 (E) 240205

Statement

The Aland Islands Peace Institute conducts research and offers educational programs focusing on conflict management, social security, security policy, autonomies and minorities. The unique character of the Aland Islands as a demilitarized, neutral, autonomous political entity is an important basis for the institute.

The Institute carries out empowerment projects together with young women in Lithuania.

A disproportionate share of the victims of trafficking in Western Europe is from Lithuania. Lithuania is not only a "source" country but also a country of transit and destination in the sex slavery business.

According to the Missing Persons Families Support Centre in Vilnius, the number of trafficked children is growing. In 2002, 22% of the victims of trafficking in their shelter were underage, whereas in 2003 50% were underage. Most of the victims are recruited among marginalised groups and many of them belong to minority groups.

The State programme against trafficking is not effective enough. Very little attention has been directed at long-term preventive activities in Lithuania.

The project "Girl Power" is carried out in cooperation with the Missing Persons Families Support Centre. It involves young women who are victims or at risk of being victims of trafficking. The project has introduced the Girl Group method in Lithuania. Girl Group leaders and trainers are educated. Empowerment, self-confidence and democracy are the corner stones of the training. The Girl Group method, which is developed in Sweden and Finland, has been adapted to the Lithuanian context, and serves as a new and innovative tool of prevention and of social reintegration for victims.

In Lithuania, as well as in Finland and Sweden, underage girls face many similar problems in becoming women. There are many other methods for trafficking prevention, but most of them only give short-term results. The Girl Group method gives sustainable results with a multiplication effect.

The starting point is the strength of the individual and the possibilities to strengthen one's own self-esteem and not, as in many other projects, the risks of being a victim and how to defend oneself when it is already too late.

The project includes training of Girl Group leaders, training of trainers, counselling and Network meetings and exchanges between Lithuanian and Nordic Girl Group leaders and trainers.

The Girl Group methodology has proven to be useful for a number of reasons. It enforces each girl's strength. It equips girls and young women with the tools necessary to participate in the democratic process. Thereby it also gives them a sense of coherence and inclusion. It empowers them to have a more positive outlook on life and think as creative people, not as victims.

The networks built by the Girl Groups can also function as safety nets and be a support base when hardships might arise later in life. Girl Groups are not courses with a specific curriculum. Girl Groups are flexible courses delivered through focus meetings where the needs and wants of the girls involved are met and supported.